



# New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

# NYC Climate Justice Agenda

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Climate Justice in a State of Emergency:  
What New York City Can Do

APRIL 2017

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# NYC Environmental Justice Alliance



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# Introduction

The new Trump Administration is poised to do serious damage to the environmental and climate justice agendas. From doubting the science of climate change to stoking racial fear both domestically and internationally, the Trump administration is ushering in a new dark age. We cannot allow progress won by the environmental justice movement to regress. In 1994, former President Clinton signed the Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, recognizing the “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations.”<sup>1</sup> Former President Obama issued a presidential proclamation on its 20th anniversary, reaffirming the right of every American “to breathe freely, drink clean water, and live on uncontaminated land.”<sup>2</sup> President Trump, on the other hand, plans to accelerate the extraction and burning of fossil fuels; gut the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and eliminate environmental policies such as the Climate Action Plan, the Clean Power Plan, the Waters of the U.S. rule, and the Paris Agreement, among other environmental safeguards.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, legislation has been proposed that would limit federal funds for geospatial information on community racial disparities.<sup>4</sup> Such data is critical for showing the linkages between environmental burdens and amenities and the corresponding socioeconomic data.

Fortunately, Mayor Bill de Blasio has made commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and increasing equity through the City’s sustainability plan, *OneNYC*, released on Earth Day 2015. Notably, the plan highlighted environmental justice and recognized equity and environmental conditions as “inexorably linked.”<sup>5</sup> NYC-EJA’s *NYC Climate Justice Agenda: Strengthening the Mayor’s OneNYC Plan (CJA)*, a report released in 2016, commended the City for its ambitious landmark goals, such as reducing GHG emissions 80% by 2050 and sending Zero Waste to landfills by 2030. The *CJA* also made several policy recommendations to strengthen the City’s plan to more expansively and specifically cultivate climate justice. While many *OneNYC* initiatives are long-term processes that require ongoing accountability, many of the City’s priorities require more substantive progress in 2017 to safeguard the health, safety, and future of low-income communities of color.

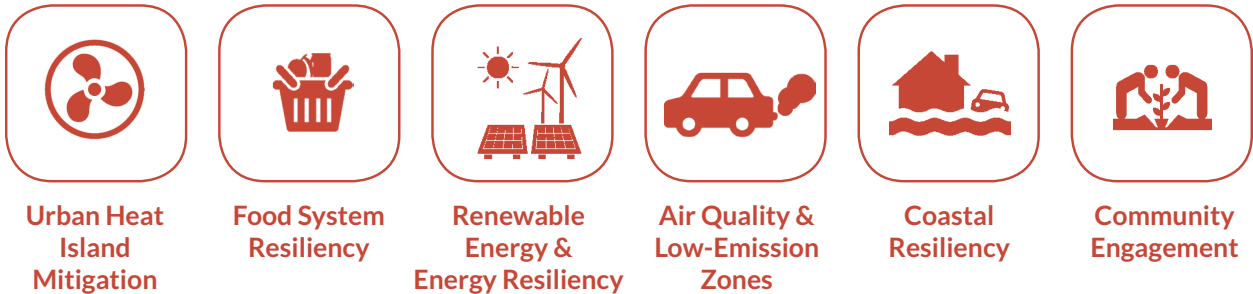


March 2017 protest of the Trump Administration’s cuts to the EPA  
Source: Gothamist



As Mayor de Blasio challenges the regressive policies and positions emerging from the Trump Administration — with the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Superstorm Sandy looming later this year — now is the opportunity to show the country how a progressive city can lead the way on environmental and climate issues.

We hope that Mayor de Blasio's next *OneNYC* progress report, slated for Earth Day 2017, includes the following priorities:

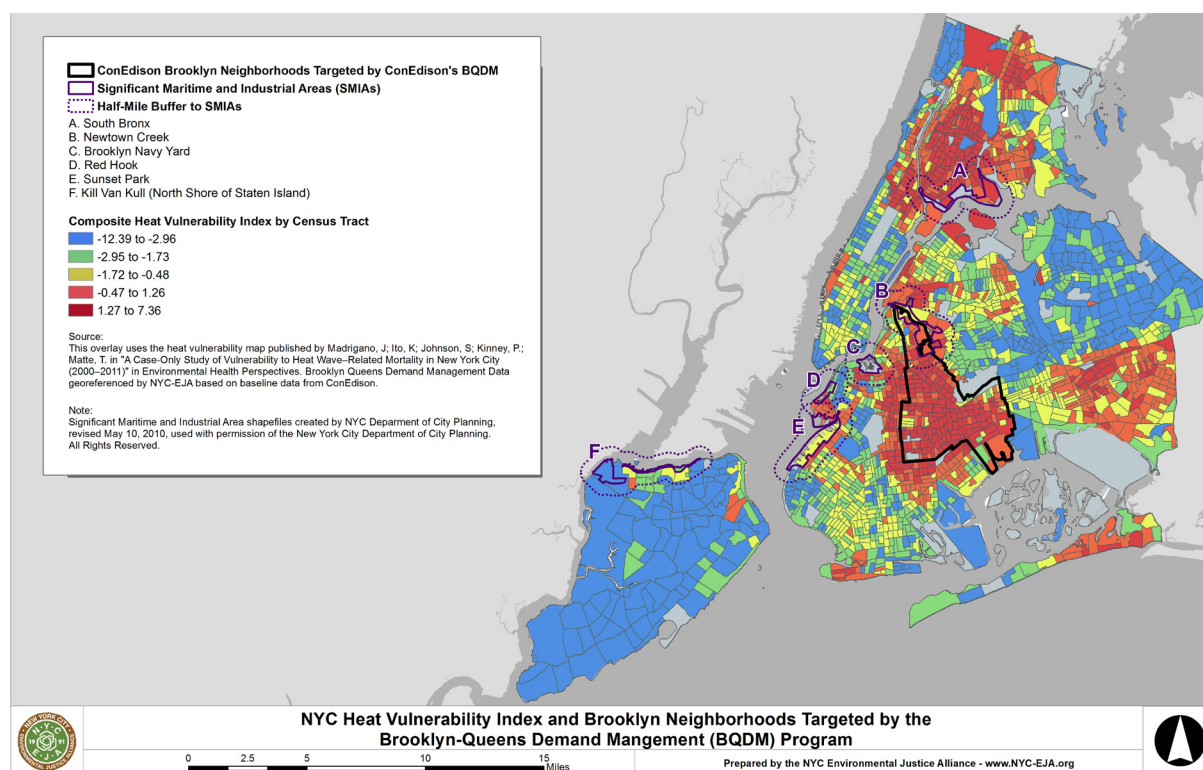


## What New York City Can Do

### URBAN HEAT ISLAND MITIGATION

The term urban heat island (UHI) describes a phenomenon by which urban areas experience higher temperatures than their surrounding rural areas due to changes in the landscape. Urban areas are characterized by decreased vegetation and increased impervious surfaces such as asphalt and concrete. Several studies have shown that low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are more likely to experience the negative effects of UHI. This is partly due to a correlation between heat risk-related land cover (i.e. lower tree coverage and a more built environment) and populations of color.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, rates of heat-related mortality have been found to be unevenly distributed in NYC, which are associated with social determinants such as poverty and poor housing quality.<sup>7</sup> Greater distribution of heat mitigation features, such as urban tree canopy are negatively correlated with income across seven U.S. cities, including New York City.<sup>8</sup> Because climate change will bring more frequent heat waves, the median number of projected annual heat-related deaths in New York City alone is expected to increase to 3,331 annually by 2080 — compared to the 638 median annual heat-related deaths between 2000 and 2006.<sup>9</sup> UHI policy solutions must grapple with these spatial differences across the city as well as the disproportionate health risks faced by vulnerable populations.

To mitigate these public health risks, the City has established the UHI Working Group to identify adaptation and mitigation strategies. These measures aim to improve scientific understanding of the UHI effect in NYC and identify strategies to mitigate its



potentially deadly effects. Prior to the formation of this Working Group, the Bloomberg Administration's *Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency (SIRR)* committed to a pilot program, originally scheduled for completion in 2015, that would increase preparedness in two heat-vulnerable neighborhoods. According to the latest publicly available timelines, the first neighborhood is to be selected by the end of 2017, subject to available funding.<sup>10</sup>

To maximize the benefits of these two heat initiatives, the City should prioritize climate- and heat-vulnerable communities with high rates of poverty and use findings from the UHI Working Group to create comprehensive, neighborhood-specific plans to both increase community preparedness in the face of heatwaves and implement long-term mitigation. The City should partner with environmental justice groups and community based organizations when selecting heat vulnerable neighborhoods, such as those in Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx, to create and implement both the local pilot and the citywide plan. For example, NYC-EJA and member Brooklyn Movement Center have been co-convening the Brooklyn Alliance for Sustainable Energy, a coalition of CBOs and community development corporations advocating around Con Edison's Brooklyn Queens Demand Management Program, which aims to address a projected energy shortfall in 12 neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens.<sup>11</sup> The population in Central Brooklyn has an extremely high heat vulnerability index<sup>12</sup> and such constraints increase vulnerability to power outages during times of increased energy demand, such as during heat waves, which could lead to lethal outcomes for residents who cannot access cooling centers. Furthermore, reporting has revealed deficiencies in terms of public knowledge about access to and locations of cooling centers.<sup>13</sup> The City should be more intentional about

***The City should prioritize climate- and heat-vulnerable communities to create a comprehensive, neighborhood-specific plan.***

cooling center accessibility with the growing number of Heat Advisory, Excessive Heat Watch, and Excessive Heat Warning days. The New York City Office of Emergency Management should dedicate resources to the management of cooling centers, similar to emergency evacuation centers.

A comprehensive approach to heat mitigation should also take into consideration the multiple co-benefits associated with green infrastructure. A recent study shows that Central Brooklyn, South Bronx, and East Harlem have a high need for ecosystem services, and that strategically greening vacant lots could provide much needed resilience provisions, while preserving and expanding community shared green space, urban agriculture, air pollution absorption, and environmental stewardship.<sup>14</sup> A neighborhood-specific heat plan should increase vegetation and green space while also maximizing these co-benefits.

The City must move beyond planning and research and begin implementing both long-term mitigation strategies as well as short-term extreme weather preparedness strategies. We commend the City for its commitment to tree plantings specifically to combat UHI in their FY 2018 budget. For the reasons described, these plantings must incorporate an environmental justice framework by including equity metrics in site selection and optimizing environmental and economic co-benefits. Specifically, metrics should assess neighborhood UHI vulnerability as a combination of social and biophysical determinants of heat-related vulnerability. Metrics that may indicate social determinants of heat vulnerability could include the proportion of homes receiving public assistance, overall deaths at home, proportions of residents who are low-income, disabled, youth, elderly, and residents of color.<sup>15</sup> Biophysical determinants could include land use, natural features including tree canopy, surface temperature, land and building cover.<sup>16</sup> Targeting neighborhoods through an environmental justice and equity framework not only ensures that tree canopies are expanded in neighborhoods most vulnerable to UHI, but can also result in localized co-benefits such as workforce development, establishing green spaces, reducing energy demand, and improving air quality for economically and environmentally overburdened communities.



*Crown Heights resident cooling off during a heatwave.  
Source: NY Daily News*

## FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCY

Superstorm Sandy highlighted critical vulnerabilities within NYC's food distribution system. Following Sandy, the *SIRR* described severe impacts and future risks to New York's food supply, and outlined goals for a comprehensive study of our food system to identify key distribution assets and prospective vulnerabilities. The major risks identified include storm surge and power losses due to storms and heat waves. In addition, chronic sea level rise, heavy downpours and high winds may impact isolated distribution or retail sites, although these risks will not likely impact broader network or consumer access. The study goals outlined in the *SIRR* include the following: create a comprehensive plan to protect the system from those vulnerabilities in the long term; improve food-related disaster preparedness at the community level; and create a comprehensive plan to identify and integrate City resources, alternative food providers, community based organizations, and other providers into its emergency feeding response plans.



*Superstorm Sandy disrupted the food supply chain and caused food shortages. Source: PennDesign/OLIN*

The *SIRR* put forth an initiative to further assess the food distribution system for vulnerabilities and create a comprehensive plan. Although initially delayed<sup>17</sup>, the resulting Five Borough Food Flow study was finally released in Fall 2016 — but much work is yet to be done to ensure that the food distribution system is sounder, stronger, and more resilient. The Five Borough Food Flow study focused primarily on understanding key economic trends in NYC's food manufacturing and distribution ecosystem to inform modernization of industrial properties and economic development. The initial call for a study was commissioned by the *SIRR* to “to identify vulnerabilities and develop a plan to protect the system from those vulnerabilities in the long term... [and] to improve food-related disaster preparedness at the community level.”<sup>18</sup> However, the creation of a comprehensive plan has been deferred to a City-convened, interagency group, which is tasked with “integrat[ing] this dataset into other resiliency efforts, evaluat[ing] potential policy decisions, and develop[ing] a strategy to communicate with private businesses and community groups to determine how to best strengthen the food supply system.”<sup>19</sup> Despite this delay in generating a comprehensive plan, both the findings and gaps in the Five Borough Food Flow study provided insights into the food system vulnerabilities, solutions for which can be addressed using a climate justice framework.



The study confirmed that the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center (FDC) is the largest food hub in the United States by volume, handling 4.5 billion tons of food for the region, and roughly 2.3 billion tons of food for New York City annually — roughly 12 percent of NYC’s total supply. Although this is a smaller percentage than previously assessed, the Hunts Point FDC provides significant throughput for our fish (45%), meat (35%) and produce (25%).

In addition, it remains a critical point of economic

activity, employing 8,500 direct jobs. Hunts Point is still the largest FDC in the world and “plays a disproportionate role in food distribution relative to similar markets in other cities”.<sup>20</sup> In addition to servicing restaurants, supermarkets, fresh markets, and bodegas, the FDC also services cash and carry wholesalers. Thus, coastal and flood protection for this important and vulnerable hub must be prioritized for investment.

***The City should take proactive steps to both invest in and support decentralized food hubs, and coordinate with grassroots organizations in developing community-level food resiliency plans.***

According to the consultant’s report, “[t]he food system is unlikely to be significantly impacted by disruption to a single distributor; however, there are infrastructure and localized risks to the food distribution system.”<sup>21</sup> The study reiterates the *SIRR*’s assessment that some locations are at a higher risk than others without identifying key distribution assets, or specifying which of these areas should be targeted for adaptation measures. Given that NYC’s food distribution is more decentralized than previously thought, remaining vulnerabilities must be identified in partnership with community organizations in parts of the city with key distribution hubs. Once these vulnerabilities are identified, the City should take proactive steps to both invest in and support decentralized food hubs, and coordinate with grassroots organizations in developing community-level food resiliency plans. For example, local groups could catalogue and map out local grocery purveyors such as bodegas and delis, and share this information with the City to coordinate necessary increases in stock in advance of extreme weather events. The study flagged that low-income, geographically isolated consumers face additional vulnerabilities, particularly if they have limited food choices under normal circumstances, i.e. food deserts. This increases the need for comprehensive food mapping at the community level, so that emergency food supplies are readily accessed by the City’s most vulnerable populations.

The study also identified that 50% of our city’s food is distributed by four major bridges and two tunnels, yet provided no recommendation for how to increase resiliency of food transit along these critical transit pathways. According to the *SIRR*, Sandy caused severe damage to critical infrastructure, including inundating many of Manhattan’s vehicular tunnels — which were closed for up to three weeks following the storm, disrupted the commutes of 217,000 vehicles and severed critical links among the five boroughs and New Jersey.<sup>22</sup> Although major bridges reopened as soon as severe winds decreased, the storm inflicted damage on over 500 miles of roads.<sup>23</sup> Given that 99% of last-mile food transport is done by truck, these impacts flag potential vulnerabilities of even a decentralized



food system.<sup>24</sup> The City's interagency group still needs to develop potential strategies to address these vulnerabilities.

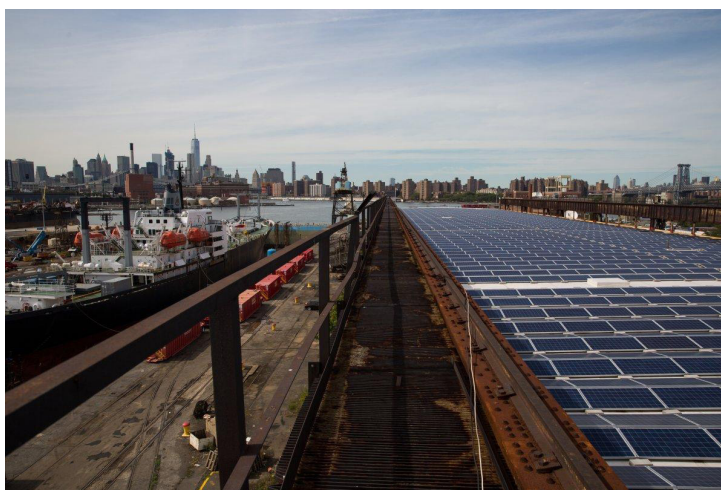
Finally, food resiliency should be considered alongside the City's Zero Waste goals. To the extent possible, the City should take steps to work with large-scale food providers such as supermarkets in advance of emergencies to minimize produce and meat waste. 75% of the City's waste is trucked to a handful of low-income communities and communities of color; therefore, unnecessary emergency-related waste and associated transport will be felt most by environmental justice communities.



## RENEWABLE ENERGY & ENERGY RESILIENCY

The City has a unique opportunity to lead in a Just Transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy. Communities which have disproportionately borne the burden of power plants and other polluting infrastructure should be prioritized for renewable energy. Investing in both renewable energy and storage technologies can provide a path toward phasing out dirty peaker plants and providing back-up power during emergencies. Because of the high rate of renters in the City, community co-ownership models are critical to enable residents and local communities to capture some of the benefits generated by clean renewable energy infrastructure. NYC-EJA has advocated for reducing barriers to participate in community co-owned solar.<sup>25</sup> We commend the City for advocating to reduce the number of participants needed for community ownership of distributed generation at the State level.

New York State is on a path to realizing some of the most aspirational offshore wind commitments in the United States. In the 2017 State of the State address, Governor Cuomo committed to develop up to 2.4 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030, enough to power 1.25 million homes.<sup>26</sup> In December of 2016, Statoil was awarded a lease by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to develop 800 megawatts of offshore wind capacity at a 79,000-acre site 17 miles from the Rockaway Peninsula.<sup>27</sup> This site has the potential to provide NYC and Long Island with a significant



*Rooftop solar at Brooklyn Navy Yard. Source: NY Daily News*



NYC-EJA and allies advocating for equitable renewable energy policies. Source: NYC-EJA

source of renewable energy. The City should work with the State and key stakeholders – prioritizing environmental justice communities and organizations, and labor unions – to ensure the benefits of wind development are captured locally. For example, the City should commit to a Power Purchase Agreement to increase its share of wind energy to meet local energy demands. This commitment would provide a viable alternative to dirty peaker plants historically sited in environmental justice neighborhoods. The City should also negotiate local hiring provisions to ensure local job creation in the emerging wind sector. Industrial waterfront neighborhoods such as Sunset Park can play an active role in meeting the wind sector’s manufacturing and distribution needs throughout the region. The City should activate the potential of its industrial waterfront neighborhoods to achieve renewable energy targets for the region, and to provide sustained local employment and economic opportunity in communities historically burdened by the extractive energy economy. In particular, the City should advocate for these provisions to be included in the State’s Offshore Wind Master Plan, which will be published by the end of 2017.<sup>28</sup>

The City has commissioned a NYC Community Energy Map to “identify and prioritize opportunities for community energy at the block level.” This analysis considered energy demands across building typologies and the physical characteristics of each block, and evaluated the technical potential of different distributed generation sources. Critically, the NYC Community Energy Map incorporated climate change vulnerability indicators, such as “energy affordability, air quality, heat risk, and flood risk.”<sup>29</sup> Climate vulnerable communities which face high energy costs must be prioritized for community energy sites. This analysis is a powerful tool for community-based organizations to identify

***The City should prioritize the deployment of Resilient PV systems in the coming years.***

and prioritize sites based on their energy demand and potential; unfortunately, it has not yet been published as a resource. The NYC Community Energy Map must be made available online to enable meaningful partnerships between the City, community organizations, and project developers.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, New York City has begun to follow the lead of states like California in pushing for energy resiliency measures. The deployment of solar-plus-storage energy systems can provide back-up energy during extreme weather events, while also disconnecting from the larger grid system as nanogrids or microgrids during blackout periods. In September 2016, Mayor de Blasio also announced New York City's first energy storage deployment target of 100 megawatt-hours by 2020.<sup>31</sup> The City University of New York established the SMART DG HUB, a centralized platform that provides up-to-date information on solar and storage technologies, finance, policies, and incentives, thereby connecting stakeholders with strategic pathways to achieve greater resiliency through the uptake of solar and storage systems.<sup>32</sup> Wider trends have also expanded the viability of solar-plus-storage in New York City, now capable of capturing revenue streams "associated with displacing energy purchases from the grid, reducing peak demand charges, and shifting grid-purchased energy from high to low time-of-use cost periods."<sup>33</sup> Additionally, large-scale resilient storage has already been deployed in other parts of the country, a trend that will likely continue as battery storage prices are expected to fall by 40 to 60 percent by 2020.<sup>34</sup> Developed in response to the massive Aliso Canyon natural gas leak, California's Mira Loma battery facility provides enough energy to power 15,000 homes during periods of energy shortage and high-energy demand.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to its promising economic potential, solar -plus-storage – also called Resilient Photovoltaic (PV) – can have extensive environmental and health benefits, particularly for vulnerable communities who have historically been in close proximity to the siting of dirty peaking power plants. Resilient PV can provide power during emergencies, blackout periods, and peak demand, especially to vital facilities such as emergency shelters, hospitals, and schools. This technology has the strong potential to displace inefficient and polluting peaking plants, thus significantly reducing air pollution in environmental justice communities which have been historically exposed to noxious pollutants generated from traditional energy infrastructure.

The City should prioritize the deployment of Resilient PV systems in the coming years. In pursuit of a Just Transition, New York City should lead the nation in the procurement of renewable energy technologies that meet ambitious emission reduction targets, and maximize health and economic benefits for frontline communities.





## AIR QUALITY & LOW-EMISSION ZONES

Environmental justice communities have long suffered from poor air quality due to living in close proximity to polluting infrastructure, such as power plants, waste facilities, and highways. Spatial analyses have found that noxious uses, which negatively impact environmental quality and public health, tend to be concentrated in industrial zones in and around low-income communities of color.<sup>36</sup> Waste transfer facilities, for example, are clustered in a handful of communities — notably North Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Southeast Queens — which are disproportionately burdened by highways and other noxious facilities that often attract dirty diesel trucks.<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, rates of respiratory diseases, such as asthma, differ across the City and peak in traditional environmental justice communities.

Curbing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 is one of *OneNYC*'s landmark goals. New York City's Roadmap to 80 x 50, published in the Fall of 2016, says the City will “study [the] feasibility of Low-Emission Zones (LEZs) to reduce truck emissions in congested areas or in communities that bear a disproportionate impact of truck traffic.”<sup>38</sup> While this initiative is still preliminary, LEZs are an important step to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve public health, especially in communities overburdened by truck traffic. LEZs, which exist in over 400 European cities, are a tool to regulate the most polluting vehicles. In New York City, these zones should be designated with the following data in mind in order to maximize the program's associated benefits: air quality data, rates of respiratory diseases, truck routes, land zoned for industrial and manufacturing uses, and equity metrics such as socioeconomic data.

To ensure the LEZs reduce pollution in the neighborhoods that need it the most, the City should continue to enhance air quality monitoring by modifying the New York City Community Air Survey (NYCCAS) to include additional monitors in environmental justice



*Exhaust from a commercial waste truck. Source: NY Daily News*

communities. The Transform Don't Trash Coalition released a report using findings from hand-held air quality monitors on truck-intensive streets in North Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Southwest Brooklyn which produced far higher ambient levels of contamination compared to area averages from monitoring done by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.<sup>39</sup> NYC-EJA and member organizations El Puente and THE POINT CDC participated in the study, and the

**Low-emission zones could reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve public health, especially in communities overburdened by truck traffic.**

findings suggest that finer data is needed to accurately capture the impacts trucks have on the communities they drive through.

The proposal for LEZs needs to be integrated with the City's new efforts to mitigate truck traffic through a zoned commercial waste system. While the current commercial waste

system entails unnecessarily long and complicated truck routes, a zoned system will reduce the vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) by establishing efficient routes. The NYC Department of Sanitation has studied the proposal for commercial waste zones and found that its implementation would yield 42 to 64 percent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>40</sup> Their analysis also showed that a zone system would reduce the emission of criteria air pollutants (those most closely linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses) by between 34 and 62 percent. However, zones alone will not address the disproportionate siting of waste transfer facilities in North Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Southeast Queens, where the majority of solid waste trucks end up nightly. Communities that deal with these burdens should be prioritized as LEZs. These findings underscore the importance of addressing truck traffic in order to establish healthier communities.



## COASTAL RESILIENCY

The City of New York has inequitably allocated funding for coastal protection projects, leaving behind many climate-vulnerable neighborhoods.<sup>41</sup> Nearly five years after Superstorm Sandy, coastal resiliency projects in Lower Manhattan have received over \$800 million from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (US-HUD) Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR) and City capital-funding streams, including East Side Coastal Resiliency, Two Bridges Coastal Resiliency, and the Lower Manhattan Resiliency projects<sup>42</sup>. While several Sandy-impacted communities have received meaningful funds for rebuilding to a more resilient standard, many other climate vulnerable communities have received significantly less funding for purely coastal protection projects.

The need for coastal protection is critical in the Significant Maritime and Industrial Areas (SMIAs), where the clustering of potentially noxious and polluting infrastructure poses high risk for potential toxic exposure in future climate events.<sup>43</sup> While some key SMIAs, such as Red Hook, have received substantial investments for coastal protection (over \$100 million for an integrated flood-protection system), other SMIAs (like Newtown Creek and the North Shore of Staten Island) have received relatively minimal resiliency and coastal protection investments, and Sunset Park has received none.<sup>44</sup> Hunts Point, an industrial waterfront neighborhood in the South Bronx, has received \$45 million for

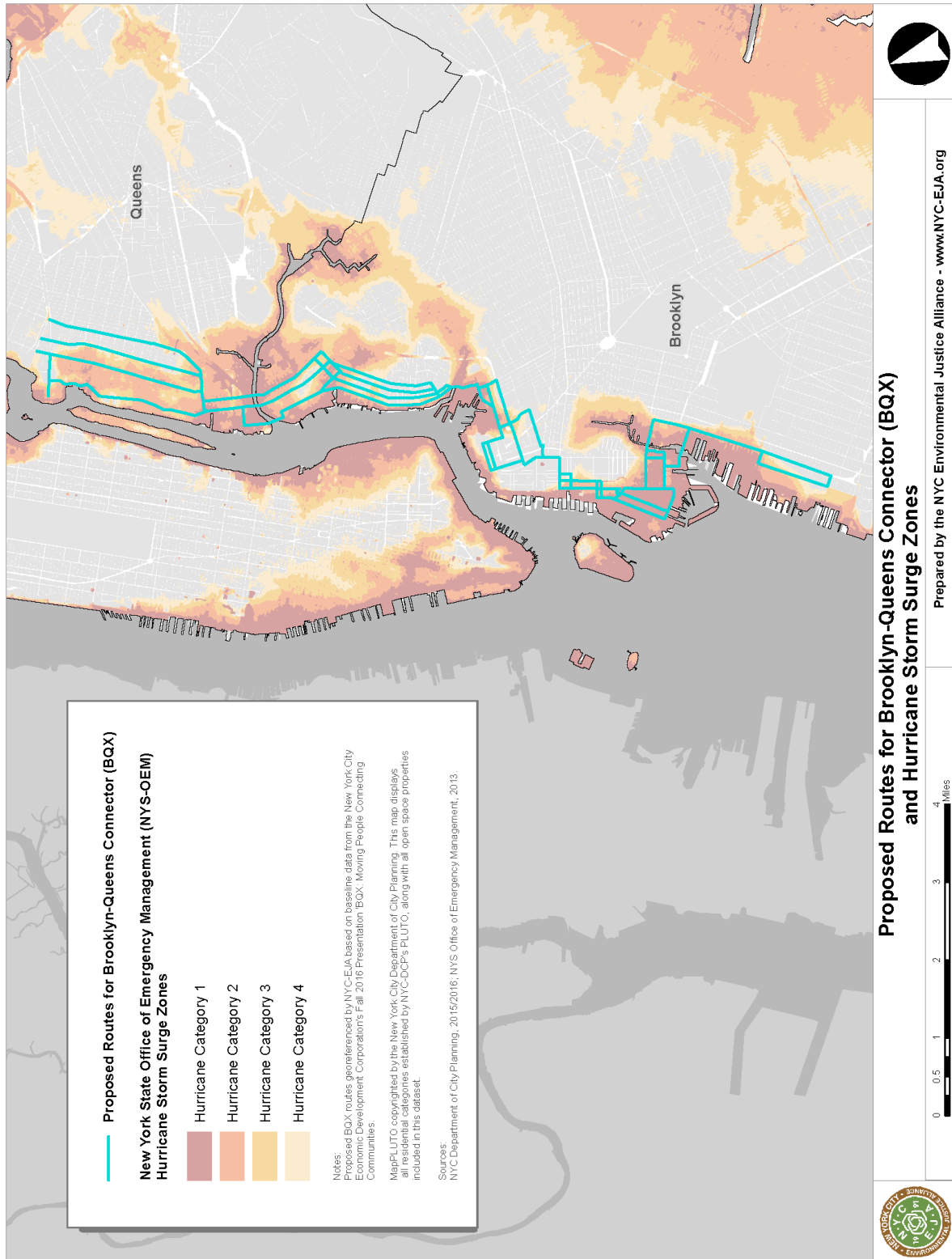
a resiliency project, but the majority of this will be funding the construction of an energy project. Although less than \$5 million will be going towards a feasibility study for coastal protection, the City has repeatedly stated its commitment to continue to fundraise for coastal protection investments in Hunts Point. Securing additional federal funds is now tenuous given the Trump Administration's hostility towards climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

***In light of unpredictable federal funding for climate adaptation, the City needs to aggressively pursue creative strategies to fund coastal resiliency projects.***

On top of this discrepancy in funding allocation, the City is also pursuing infrastructure investments that directly contradict efforts to bolster NYC against climate-change-related extreme weather and coastal flooding. In 2016, the City partnered with the New York City Economic Development Corporation to begin aggressively promoting the Brooklyn Queens Connector (BQX), a streetcar that aims to connect neighborhoods along the waterfront from Sunset Park, Brooklyn to Astoria, Queens. The controversial project raised concerns from community-based organizations along the proposed route, including NYC-EJA member UPROSE in Sunset Park. UPROSE critiqued the tax-increment financing mechanism that relies on development-driven property value increases along the waterfront, threatening to displace low-income residents, and locally owned businesses. UPROSE has also been critical of the proposed route, because it appears to have been chosen based on the locations of current luxury developments owned by members of the "Friends of the BQX." Additionally, the majority of the proposed BQX route falls directly in a flood zone. While some of the communities along the proposed route are in need of more transportation options, like Red Hook, Brooklyn, the BQX is not the solution. The BQX does not promise to be affordable, will not be a part of the greater MTA system and will therefore not offer or accept transfers between the streetcar and the subway or an MTA bus. Rather than commit to a boondoggle transportation initiative that fuels gentrification, the City should invest equitably in public transportation initiatives that increase resiliency and preserve the affordability of NYC's working waterfront.

In light of unpredictable federal funding for climate adaptation, the City needs to aggressively pursue creative strategies to fund coastal resiliency projects. The South Bronx Community Resiliency Agenda (SBCRA), a coalition of groups convened by THE POINT CDC and NYC-EJA to increase resiliency in and around the South Bronx SMIA, has inventoried over 20 existing plans to identify and sharpen potential adaptation and mitigation strategies for Longwood, Mott Haven, Port Morris, Soundview, and Hunts Point. The main roadblock towards creating a more resilient South Bronx has been a lack of funding — not a lack of planning. With the SBCRA as a client, Pratt Institute's Delta Cities Studio proposed a few innovative ideas to fund these projects. One idea is







*Newtown Creek immediately after Superstorm Sandy*  
Source: FDNY Incidents

to create a citywide coastal resilience fund by adding a \$100 fee on all NYC Department of Buildings permits issued, with the potential to generate more than \$19 million annually for the purposes of coastal protection. Another idea is to have businesses within the SMIA contribute \$0.10 per sq. foot of property to a citywide fund, with the City matching private contributions at 25%. Under this proposal, the South Bronx SMIA has the potential to generate approximately \$4 million a year.<sup>45</sup> The City must commit to creating a continuous funding stream for phased construction of coastal infrastructure that does not rely on federal funding.

Two waterbodies in New York City — the Newtown Creek and the Gowanus Canal — are designated as Superfund sites. The Newtown Creek and the Gowanus Canal are two of the most polluted waterbodies in the United States, and are known to contain toxic and hazardous waste. The neighborhoods around these sites are vulnerable to the potential toxic exposure that could stem from flooding and storm surge in a future storm event. Compounding the risk of toxic exposure, these neighborhoods also have high occurrences of brownfields. Currently, the Trump administration has proposed funding cuts as high as 44% for the EPA's brownfield remediation programs, as part of the general assault on federal environmental programs.<sup>46</sup> To address the flooding issue, the City has committed only \$2 million to the Gowanus Canal and Newtown Creek Storm Barrier Study. Results from this study should be made public, and the City should not rely solely on federal funding to move results forward.



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Without an inclusive, long-term decision making process with multiple opportunities for community oversight, the implementation of the City's sustainability and resiliency initiatives remains primarily top-down.<sup>47</sup> At a 2015 City Council Oversight Hearing for *OneNYC* and in the NYC Climate Justice Agenda, NYC-EJA advocated for the City to create a long-term public participation process to engage community-based organizations in the evaluation and implementation of *OneNYC* specifically, and climate resiliency planning more broadly.<sup>48</sup> Nearly two years after the plan's release, such a mechanism has not yet been put in place. The City must reinstate ongoing and open communication channels — such as through the Mayor's Sustainability Advisory Board, the 80x50 Working Group and community boards — between community stakeholders, grassroots advocates, and City agencies. Citywide sustainability and resiliency efforts must be coordinated with grassroots community-based planning to ensure that bottom-up neighborhood priorities are elevated. Sustainability and resiliency plans, which seek to protect the most vulnerable communities from climate change impacts, will always fall short of this goal if these grassroots voices are absent from the table. The City must create a genuine community engagement process to inform and oversee the implementation of *OneNYC*.

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## Conclusion

While progress on environmental and social issues are threatened on the federal level, New York City must lead the way to a more just and sustainable future for all residents — especially those who have been historically environmentally overburdened. We commend Mayor DeBlasio for reframing the conversation around sustainability and resiliency by putting equity at the forefront; however, there is considerable work to be done to safeguard low-income communities of color from various climate change impacts. We hope to see continued advancements on the urban heat island effect, food distribution resiliency, renewable energy, air quality, and coastal resiliency, as well as expanded community engagement mechanisms. The environmental justice movement will continue to work with Mayor de Blasio's team to expound on and implement these initiatives, and we look forward to the progress that will be announced this Earth Day.



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